

# Rikiki AND THE WIZARD

A S'RIAN FOLK STORY

PATRICIA C. WREDE

Once there was a wizard whose luck time was three days long. He was the luckiest wizard in the world, and he worked hard at his magic. He did a good business working spells for the people of Liavek. But the wizard was not satisfied.

He bought himself musty dusty books in Old Tichenese and burned sheep-fat lamps until late at night while he read them and practiced the spells they contained. Soon he had a house on Wizards' Row, and the Levar himself was buying spells from him. But the wizard was not satisfied.

He traveled to faraway places to learn their magics, then went into his cellar and invented spells of his own. He became the best wizard in the world, as well as the luckiest. People came from Ka Zhir and Tichen and even from the Farlands just to buy spells from him. The wizard became very rich and very famous. But he was still not satisfied.

"Everyone knows who I am now," he said to himself. "But in a few hundred years they will not remember me. I must find a way to make my reputation last."

Now, the wizard had a daughter of whom he was very proud. She had skin like a flower petal, and long hair that fell down to her feet, and bright black eyes that danced like the sun on the Sea of Luck. She was the most beautiful woman in seven cities, and her name was Ryvenna.

The wizard decided to call on the gods and offer his daughter in marriage to whichever one would promise to make him so rich and so

famous that he would never be forgotten for as long as people lived around the Sea of Luck. "For," he thought, "not only will I be as rich and famous as anyone could desire, I will also get my Ryvenna a husband worthy of her beauty."

The wizard made his preparations and cast his spells. He worked for a week to get everything right. But the gods were angry with him, because he had never asked his daughter whether she agreed to his plan.

"Bad enough that he presumes we'd want her," grumbled Welenen the Rain-Bringer. "But giving the girl away without telling her? He acts as if she were a pet dog or a camel!" And the other gods agreed.

So when the wizard cast his spell, none of the gods would answer. He called and called, for two days and for three days, and nothing happened. Finally he resolved to try one last time. He set out the gold wire and burned the last of the special herbs and put all of his luck into the spell (and he was the luckiest wizard in the world).

Now, Rikiki had been at the meeting where all the gods agreed not to answer the wizard's summons, and he had agreed with them. But Rikiki is a blue chipmunk, and chipmunks do not have long memories. Furthermore, they are insatiably curious. When the wizard put all his effort into his last try, Rikiki couldn't resist answering, just to see what was happening. So when the smoke cleared, the wizard saw a blue chipmunk sitting before him, looking up at him with black eyes. "Nuts?" asked Rikiki.

The wizard was very angry to find that the only god who had answered his summons was a blue chipmunk. But Rikiki *was* a god, so the wizard said, "Rikiki! I will give you my daughter, who is the most beautiful woman in seven cities, if you will make me as rich and famous as I desire!"

"Daughter?" said Rikiki, "What daughter? New kind of nut?"

"No. She is a woman, the most beautiful woman in seven cities, and I will give her to you if you do as I ask!"

"Oh!" said Rikiki. "Seven cities of nuts! What want?"

"No, no! My daughter, not nuts!"

"Daughter? Don't want daughter. Want nuts! Where nuts?"

By this time, the wizard had decided that Rikiki was no use to him, so he said, "North, Rikiki. North along the shore of the Sea of Luck. Lots of nuts, Rikiki!"

"Good!" said Rikiki. "Like nuts!" And he scurried out of the wizard's house and ran north. He ran up and down the shore of the Sea of Luck,

looking for the nuts the wizard had promised, but he didn't find any. He dug holes in the ground, looking for the nuts. The dirt that he threw out of the holes became the Silverspine Mountains, but Rikiki didn't find any nuts. So he went back to the wizard's house.

"No nuts north!" said Rikiki. "Where nuts?"

"I don't have any nuts!" said the wizard. "Go away!"

"Said nuts north. Didn't find nuts. Want nuts! Where look?"

"Go west, Rikiki," said the wizard. "Go a long, long way. Find nuts. And don't come back!"

"Good!" said Rikiki. "Like nuts!" And he scurried out of the wizard's house and ran west. He ran for a long, long time, but he didn't find any nuts. Finally he came to a mountain range on the other side of the plains. "No nuts here," said Rikiki, and he turned around and went back. It was midday and the sun was very hot. Rikiki let his tail droop on the ground as he ran, and it made a line in the dusty ground. The line became the Cat River. But Rikiki still didn't find any nuts. So he went to see the wizard again.

"No nuts west!" Rikiki said when he got back to the wizard's house. "Where nuts?"

"Not again!" said the wizard.

"Want nuts!" Rikiki insisted. He looked at the wizard with his black eyes.

The wizard remembered that Rikiki was a god, and he began to be a little frightened. "No nuts here, Rikiki," he said.

"Promised nuts!" said Rikiki. "Where?"

The wizard thought for a moment, then he said, "Go south, Rikiki. Go a long, long way south." He knew that south of Liavek is the Sea of Luck, and he was sure that it was deep enough and wide enough to drown a chipmunk, even if the chipmunk was a god.

Rikiki nodded and scurried off. The wizard heaved a sigh of relief and sat down to think of some other way to become rich and famous forever.

Now, the wizard's daughter Ryvenna had been listening at the door since her father started his spell casting. She had thought Rikiki sounded nice, so she ran out to the Two-Copper Bazaar and bought some chestnuts from a street vendor. She returned just in time to hear the wizard send Rikiki south to drown in the Sea of Luck.

Quickly, Ryvenna opened up the bag of chestnuts. When Rikiki came scurrying out, she said, "Nuts, Rikiki! Here are nuts!" and held out the bag.

Rikiki stopped. "Nuts? Nuts for Rikiki?" He came over and sat in Ryvenna's lap while she fed him all the chestnuts she had brought from the Two-Copper Bazaar. When he finished, he looked up and said hopefully, "Nice nut lady! More nuts?"

"I'm sorry, Rikiki," said Ryvenna. "They're all gone."

"Oh! Fix easy," said Rikiki. He looked at the empty bag and crossed his eyes, and the bag was full again. "More nuts!" he said, and Ryvenna fed him again.

Rikiki was finishing the second bag of nuts when the wizard came out of his study. "What is he doing here?" the wizard demanded when he saw Rikiki.

"Eating nuts," said his daughter coolly. She was annoyed with him for trying to marry her to a god without asking her, and for trying to drown Rikiki. "He made the bag fill up again after it was empty."

"I don't care about nuts!" said the wizard.

Rikiki looked up. "Not like nuts?"

"Nuts aren't worth anything for people! I want gold! I want to be famous! And I want that blue chipmunk out of my house!"

"Oh!" said Rikiki. He looked cross-eyed at the bag again, then said to Ryvenna, "Dump over."

Ryvenna turned the bag upside down. A stream of gold chestnuts fell out, more chestnuts than the bag could possibly hold. They rolled all over the floor. The wizard stood staring with his mouth open.

"Gold nuts for nice nut lady!" said Rikiki happily. The wizard closed his mouth and swallowed twice. Then he said, "What about my fame?"

"Fame?" said Rikiki. "What fame? Fame good to eat? Like nuts?"

"No, Rikiki," Ryvenna said. "Fame is having everyone know who you are. Father wants to be so famous no one will ever forget him."

"Oh!" Rikiki thought for minute. "Not forget?"

"That's right!" said the wizard eagerly.

Rikiki sat very still, staring at the wizard, and his tail twitched. Then he said, "Not forget! All fixed."

"You have?" said the wizard, who was beginning to regret sending Rikiki to drown in the Sea of Luck.

"All done," Rikiki replied. He looked at Ryvenna. "Nuts all gone. 'Bye, nice nut lady!" And he disappeared.

"Well," said the wizard, "there's the last of my wishes; that blasted blue chipmunk is gone."

"I thought he was cute," said Ryvenna.

"Bah! He's a silly blue god who'll do anything for nuts. It was very clever of you to get some for him. Now help me pick up these gold chestnuts he made for me; we wouldn't want to lose one."

The wizard bent over and tried to pick up one of the golden chestnuts, but as soon as he touched it, it turned into a real chestnut. He threw it down and tried another, but the same thing happened. Only Ryvenna could pick up the golden chestnuts without changing them back into real ones, and the magic chestnut bag would only make more gold for her. Worse yet, the wizard discovered that whenever he touched one of his gold levars it, too, turned into a chestnut. So did his jeweled belts and bracelets. Even the food he ate turned into chestnuts as soon as he touched it.

The wizard tried to keep his affliction<sup>1</sup> a secret, but it was impossible. Soon everyone was talking about what Rikiki had done to the luckiest wizard in the world. Even people who never bought spells and who had no dealings with magicians heard the story and laughed at it. So the wizard became more famous than ever, more famous, indeed, than he wanted to be. And his fame has lasted to this day, for people still tell his story.

Ryvenna was a clever woman, and she knew that magic does not last. The magic chestnut bag ran out in a year and a day, but before it did she had poured a goodly supply of gold chestnuts from it. She became a wealthy woman, and eventually fell in love with and married a sea captain who was as kind as he was handsome. And she never forgot to leave a bowl of nuts at the door for Rikiki every night as long as she lived. 🐉

1 affliction: curse; suffering